

# Understanding **CONFLICT**

# Communication – Using “I” statements

## Objectives

- Develop awareness of the importance of effective and accurate self-expression.
- Understand the components of an “I” statement.
- Formulate an “I” statement that expresses one’s self.

## Audience

High school and above

## Time

45 minutes

## Supplies needed

- The Angry Statement
- Flip chart
- Markers
- Paper, pens

## Source

Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen. 2000. *Difficult Conversations: How to discuss what matters most.* New York: Penguin Books.

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## Background

**W**e learn to communicate as young children, and it becomes a natural part of everyday living. Yet, we may find ourselves in situations where we feel misunderstood. Communication involves not only speaking but also listening. Expressing ourselves clearly means that what we say most closely resembles what we feel. This can be challenging because our emotions can get us off track, so that our words and our feelings don’t match. Constructing an “I” statement is a strategy to accurately express oneself.

## What to do

**A**sk for a volunteer to read Chris’ attached statement. Then ask the audience what their response would be if the statement was directed at them (angry, defensive, hurt, upset).

Think back to a time when you were very angry. What feelings did we hear in Chris’ words (anger, upset)? What other feelings might he have?

What was Chris’ behavior that contributed to negative feelings (loud voice, emotion, gestures)? Let’s explore some other ways that Chris could have expressed himself that would more accurately match his feelings with his words.

Using an “I” statement helps us take responsibility for how we feel. An example is, “I’m happy that you came to the program today because I enjoy teaching about communication.” We start out by saying “I”. An “I” statement has three parts: the feeling, what happened, and why it matters.

Write on a flip chart: I \_\_\_\_\_

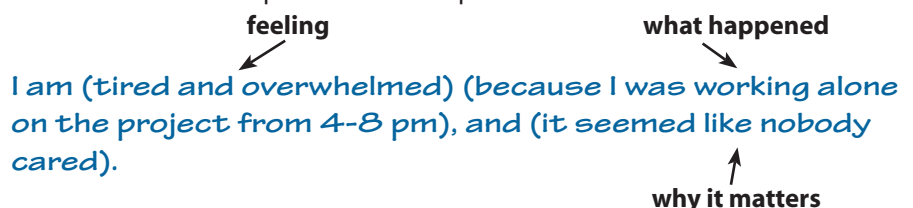
What was Chris feeling? Anger is often the presenting emotion, a mask for other feelings. Probe for feelings beyond anger, such as hurt, overwhelmed, tired, or frustrated. Ask the group for an answer and add to the sentence. **I am tired and overwhelmed.**

What was Chris upset about? (e.g. not enough help, working so hard, feeling like nobody cared)

Ask the group for an answer and add to the sentence.

**I am tired and overwhelmed because I was working alone on the project from 4-8 pm, and it seemed like nobody cared.**

Write the “I” statement parts above each part of the sentence.





SUPPORT MATERIAL

## Chris' angry statement



If Chris made this statement to you, how would you react?

"I" statements can be a very helpful way to put our feelings into words so others can better understand what we may be experiencing. One important point to remember is we must be sincere and speak from the heart. We choose to use "I" messages when the relationship and the issues are important.

Let's practice forming an "I" statement from something that happened to you over the last few days. Does anyone have an example? Let's work through the same process we just used by writing the three parts onto the flip chart to help us get started.

Now, let's take a quiet moment to think about a situation where an "I" message would be helpful to you. Write down your "I" statement. Share as a group if participants are willing.

Even though it takes awhile to form an "I" statement in the beginning, it gets easier once we practice.

### Summary

**A**n "I" statement is one strategy to improve communication with others. By using the word "I," we take responsibility for what we are going to say. We try to match our words with our feelings, digging deeper beyond anger. Three parts make the "I" statement effective. What are the three parts of an "I" message (state the feeling, what happened, why it matters)? Using "I" statements can help us to have clearer communication with others, but keep in mind we still may not get what we want.

### Read with an angry expression.

*"I'm the only one who works around here!"*

*You didn't do anything to help out!*

*It's always that way!*

*You're out having fun, and you always*

*show up when the work is done!*

*Thanks a lot, you jerk!"*